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Morale Low at Moscow Embassy

'Strong Letter' Demands Information on Radiation Hazard

By Peter Osnos

Washington Post Foreign Service

MOSCOW, Feb. 27—American diplomats in Moscow have written a "very strong" letter to top State Department officials demanding to be told the full extent of the radiation problem at the embassy here and whether it represents a serious health hazard, sources said today.

Morale in the embassy, one of the largest and most important American posts abroad, has plummeted since reports of the radiation began to circulate three weeks ago, the sources said. Although employees have been briefed, a full explanation of the situation, including its causes and its dangers has been withheld.

The letter was drafted last week by the local branch of the American Foreign Service Association and was intended for Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger. At the request of senior embassy officials, only a copy of the letter was sent to Washington with the original going to Ambassador Walter J. Stoessel.

"People are incensed," said one of those responsible for preparing the letter. So far no response has been received and further action—including possible legal action—is being considered.

At the outset, the impression given to embassy employees was that the radiation was caused solely by Soviet surveillance equipment which included microwave beams focused on the embassy. There have been reports from Washington this week, however, that the purpose of the Soviet radiation was to block American eavesdropping.

In any event, the true story is apparently known to very few people in the embassy, perhaps only Stoessel himself. Kissinger is responsible for the way the matter is being handled, it is understood, and he has stressed on several occasions that it is highly sensitive. He said that "discussions" are under way to solve the problem.

Since Monday, Sam Zweifel, a State Department physician, has been in Moscow performing blood tests on all

embassy personnel and their families. It is not clear whether these tests were precipitated by discovery of specific problems at the embassy, as a report from Washington today suggested, or are simply a precaution.

One explanation for Dr. Zweifel's presence is that the regular embassy physician, Thomas Johnson, is on a vacation that was postponed when the radiation issue surfaced.

[In Washington, the State Department said it has sent a medical technician to Moscow to conduct blood tests on U.S. embassy personnel who may have been exposed to the microwave emissions. William Watson, the department's medical director, said: "The medical division has found no medical problems that it believes to be related to the situation at the embassy."]

The report from Washington also said that Stoessel suffered from anemia, which may have been aggravated by the radiation here. The embassy has already denied an earlier report that

Stoessel is ill, but the ambassador refused to comment on today's report, he did deny that he plans to leave Moscow for reassignment. Stoessel has been here for two years.

At earlier briefings and again today, embassy officials strongly implied—but did not say directly—that there appears to be no great danger from the radiation to people living in or working at the embassy. But the uncertainty is apparently beginning to have its effect on some embassy personnel and their families.

"We have a need and a right to know what this is all about," said one angry American. "How long is this going to continue?"

U.S. Paid Widower In Radiation Case

Reuter

The United States compensated the husband of a woman who died of cancer in 1969 after she had been exposed to microwave emissions at the American embassy in Moscow, informed sources said yesterday.

The sources said the woman developed a mole on her face while working as a secretary from 1960 to 1962 in a part of the embassy exposed to microwave emissions believed to be from Soviet radio jamming devices.

The mole developed into melanoma—a usually malignant tumor—and the woman, for whom the sources requested anonymity, died in 1969.

Her husband applied for compensation from the government on the grounds that her death may have been caused by her exposure to microwaves beamed at the embassy, the sources said. His claim, for less than \$10,000 in lost wages, was honored.